

Message Text

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P 131335Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6269

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 1 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0822

E.O. 11652: GDS

TAGS: OVIP (SIMON, WILLIAM), SY

SUBJ: SECRETARY SIMON'S VISIT TO SYRIA

REF: A. STATE 30938; B. DAMASCUS 592

1. SUMMARY: EMBASSY COMMENTS ON TURUST OF SARG POSITIONS AND RECOMMENDED US POSITIONS ON TOPICS INDICATED IN REF B ARE PROVIDED BELOW. WE HAVE NOTED THE FEW TOPICS WE BELIEVE SYRIANS MAY RAISE, TOPICS WE RECOMMEND SECRETARY SIMON RAISE INDEPENDENTLY, AND ALSO TOPICS WE DOUBT SYRIANS WILL RAISE AND THOSE WE RECOMMEND SECRETARY SIMON NOT INTRODUCE. DEPT AND TREASURY ARE REQUESTED TO PROVIDE APPROPRIATE INFORMATION FOR SECRETARY'S BRIEFING BOOK IN TWO INSTANCES BELOW, PARAS 2F AND G. DEPT (S/S-S) REQUESTED TO PROVIDE AMBASSADOR WITH ONE COPY OF BRIEFING BOOK ON SYRIA UPON SECRETARY'S ARRIVAL IN SYRIA AND ALSO TEN COPIES OF ALL EASILY REPRODUCIBLE UNCLASSIFIED MATERIAL PROVIDED TO SECRETARY AND HIS PARTY REGARDING SYRIA WHICH WOULD BE OF GREAT HELP TO EMBASSY WITH VISITING CODELS AND OTHER VIP VISITORS. END SUMMARY.

2. IN RESPONSE TO DEPT'S REQUEST, FOLLOWING ARE OUR COMMENTS ON PROBABLE SARG POSITIONS AND RECOMMENDED US POSITIONS ON TOPICS LISTED IN PARA 4 REF A.

A. POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT OF BILATERAL TIES BETWEEN SYRIA AND US, ESPECIALLY IN ECONOMIC SPHERE.

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SARG POSITION: SYRIAN LEADERSHIP HAS OFTEN EXPRESSED

TO HIGH-LEVEL US VISITORS THAT IT WANTS CLOSER BILATERAL TIES WITH US. SYRIAN TECHNOCRATS BELIEVE IN OUR TECHNOLOGY AND SEE IT AS A KEY TO HELP OPEN THE DOOR TO SYRIAN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT.

AS EVIDENCE OF OUR DESIRE FOR CLOSER BILATERAL RELATIONS, SYRIA MEASURES OUR RELATIVE POSITIVE ATTITUDE BY INDICATIONS WE GIVE THROUGH OUR ASSISTANCE PROGRAM, AS WELL AS BY OUR SUCCESS IN ATTRACTING US PRIVATE BUSINESSMEN TO DAMASCUS. SINCE OUR FIRST MEETINGS IN 1974, DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR AND MINISTER OF ECONOMY IMADI HAVE PUSHED US HARD ON LATTER SUBJECT, ESPECIALLY ON PERSUADING US OIL COMPANIES TO EXPLORE FOR OIL IN SYRIA AND US CONSTRUCTION AND OTHER TURNKEY FIRMS TO WORK HERE. SO FAR, THEY HAVE BEEN DISAPPOINTED (WITH SINGLE EXCEPTION OF TRIPCO'S OFFSHORE PETROLEUM CONCESSION) AND MAY EXPRESS THEIR DISAPPOINTMENT AND FRUSTRATION. ON THE ASSISTANCE SIDE, AS A.I.D. ASSISTANT ADMINISTRATOR NOOTER HEARD FROM DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR FEBRUARY 8, SYRIA WANTS MORE US AID, WANT OUR ASSISTANCE STUDIES TO BE SPEDDED UP (TO MEET IMPATIENT SYRIAN DESIRE FOR RAPID PROJECT IMPLEMENTATION; SYRIAN PLANNERS FIND OUR AID PROCEDURES, NEED FOR FEASIBILITY STUDIES, ETC., TIME-CONSUMING, DIFFICULT AND CUMBERSOME IN COMPARISON WITH OTHER DONORS -- ESPECIALLY FROM EAST, AND POSSIBLY FROM OTHER ARABS), AND SOME SYRIANS ALSO SAY OUR COMMODITIES/EQUIPMENT, ALTHOUGH OFFERED WITH GENEROUS TERMS, ARE TOO EXPENSIVE RELATIVE TO EASTERN AND WESTERN EUROPE.

US POSITION: WE HAVE MOVED AS QUICKLY AS POSSIBLE TO MEET SYRIAN AID REQUESTS (POSSIBLY MORE QUICKLY THAN IN MANY AREAS OF THE WORLD; AT THE SAME TIME, WE MUST MEET LEGISLATIVE REQUIREMENTS PLACED ON OUR WORLDWIDE ASSISTANCE PROGRAMS, JUST AS IBRD STOCKHOLDERS PLACE REQUIREMENTS FOR FEASIBILITY STUDIES AND ECONOMIC JUSTIFICATION ON POTENTIAL IBRD PROJECTS. WE MOVED IMMEDIATELY TO ESTABLISH HIGH-LEVEL AND HIGHLY QUALIFIED A.I.D. MISSION IN DAMASCUS DESPITE PERSONAL DISRUPTIONS IN OFFICERS' ASSIGNMENTS, SERIOUS HOUSING PROBLEMS AND COSTS IN DAMASCUS AND LACK OF A.I.D. BILATERAL AGREEMENT. FEBRUARY AND JUNE 1975 AGREEMENTS ON \$1 MILLION GRANT AID TO SYRIANS FOR TRAINING IN US AND \$48 MILLION LOAN AGREEMENT FOR DAMASCUS URBAN WATER SUPPLY PROJECT HAVE MOVED ALONG RAPIDLY. FOUR MILLION DOLLAR TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE

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GRANT FOR TECHNICAL SERVICES AND FEASIBILITY STUDIES MOVED MORE SLOWLY AS WE AWAITED SYRIAN DESCRIPTION OF TA DESIRED (SCOPES OF WORK) AND DELAYS HAVE BEEN ENCOUNTERED IN ARRANGING FOR BIDS AND AWARDING CONTRACTS UNDER \$30 MILLION COMMODITY IMPORT LOAN (AGRICULTURAL EQUIPMENT). QUALITY OF US EQUIPMENT MAY MEAN SOMEWHAT HIGHER PRICES, BUT LOAN FOR 40 YEARS MEANS REAL ECONOMIC COST CAN BE CONSIDERED AS ONLY 50 PER CENT OR LESS OF INITIAL PRICE AND REMAINDER IS ECONOMIC

GRANT. QUALITY MEANS GREATER DURABILITY AND USUALLY PAYS OFF IN THE LONG RUN.

B. STATUS OF SYRIA'S PL-480 REQUEST FOR FY 76:

SARG POSITION: WHAT IS THE STATUS? SYRIANS, INEXPERIENCED WITH PL 480 FOR ALMOST TEN YEARS, HAD PROBLEMS IN TENDERING, ARRANGING FOR S IPS, ETC., WHICH COST SARG MONEY DURING FY 1975 PROGRAM.

US POSITION: PER STATE 29822 OF FEBRUARY 6, 35,000 METRIC TON RICE PROGRAM FOR FY OR CY 76 AWAITING PRESIDENTIAL DETERMINATION, AND INTERAGENCY STAFF COMMITTEE CONSIDERATION OF VEGOIL PROGRAM HAD NOT YET BEGUN. (NOTE: PRESUMABLY, THERE WILL BE FURTHER PROGRESS BY FEBRUARY 28 AND SUCH INFORMATION SHOULD BE INSERTED IN BRIEFING BOOK.) EXPERIENCE GAINED WITH TENDERS AND SHIPPING UNDER LAST YEAR'S PROGRAM SHOULD HELP TO OVERCOME SIMILAR PROBLEMS THIS YEAR. WE COULD NOT INCLUDE WHEAT IN THIS YEAR'S PROGRAM GIVEN OFFICIAL SYRIAN REPORTS OF GOOD SYRIAN WHEAT CROP THIS YEAR.

C. OUR PLEASURE ON PROGRESS MADE ON CLAIMS NEGOTIATIONS.

SARG POSITION: PROBABLY WILL NOT RAISE, EXCEPT POSSIBLY TO NOTE THEY HOPE WE ARE PLEASED WITH SETTLEMENT AGREEMENT ON LOCAL CURRENTLY AND DOLLAR LOAN DEBT DELINQUENCIES. WE DOUBT SYRIANS WILL RAISE EXPORT-IMPORT BANK CLAIM OR FORTH-COMING PRIVATE AND USG CLAIMS.

US POSITION: WE ARE VERY PLEASED THAT AGREEMENT HAS BEEN REACHED IN PRINCIPLE ON DELINQUENT LOCAL CURRENCY AND DOLLAR DEBTS, PARTICULARLY SINCE WE HAD WORKED HARD IN WASHINGTON TO OBTAIN THE UNIQUE STRETCH-OUT (2-1/2 YEARS)
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REPAYMENT SCHEDULE. WE LOOK FORWARD TO IMMINENT SIGNING BY THE SYRIAN FINANCE MINISTER OF THE AGREED MINUTES CONCERNING THE DEBTS AND THE IMMEDIATE BEGINNING OF THE CATCH-UP PAYMENTS ALREADY AGREED UPON BETWEEN OUR TWO GOVERNMENTS. (NOTE: FINANCE MINISTER SHARIF HAS HAD OUR FINAL TEXT SINCE FEBRUARY 7, AND SO FAR HAS NOT RESPONDED TO OUR REQUEST FOR APPOINTMENT FOR SIGNATURE; HE REPORTEDLY LEAVES SHORTLY FOR BAGHDAD FOR PERHAPS FOUR OR FIVE DAYS; LATEST STATUS REPORTS ON THESE CLAIMS WILL BE SENT PRIOR TO SECRETARY SIMON'S DEPARTURE FOR INSERTION IN BRIEFING BOOK.)

ON SMALL \$84,000 EXPORT-IMPORT BANK CLAIM, WOULD BE USEFUL FOR SECRETARY SIMON TO MENTION OUR DESIRE FOR SETTLEMENT SO THAT SARG MAY HAVE ANOTHER USG-EXECUTIVE BRANCH TOOL AVAILABLE TO AID ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT IN SYRIA, JUST AS DO MOST WESTERN

EUROPEAN COUNTRIES. SARG HAS PROMISED TO ASSIST US WITH LEGAL FORMALITIES IN ORDER TO COLLECT DEBT FROM PRIVATE SYRIAN BUSINESSMAN ORIGINALLY INVOLVED (GEORGES BUSTANI, IN LEBANON SINCE 1965) IF RPT IF HE RETURNS TO WORK IN SYRIA, I.E., TO INCLUDE IT WITH OTHER SYRIAN DEBTS THAT BUSTANI LEFT BEHIND WHEN HE DEPARTED SYRIA. THE AMOUNT IS SO SMALL AND WE WOULD LIKE TO CLEAN THE SLATE WITH THE EXPORT-IMPORT BNAK IN ORDER TO HAVE THE BENEFITS OF THEIR INVOLVEMENT IN SYRIA. COULD NOT SARG FIND SOME MEANS TO PAY THIS DEBT AND ADD IT TO COLLECTIONS SARG WILL MAKE FROM BUSTANI WHEN HE RETURNS, OR SARG PAY DEBT (AFTER ALL IT NATIONALIZED BUSTANI AND THEREFORE IS SUCCESSOR TO HIS FIRM) AND ADD AMOUNT TO LEGAL CASE SARG COULD RAISE AGAINST BUSTANI IN LEBANESE COURTS FOR REPAYMENT OF ALL DEBTS (CA LS 2 MILLION OR \$548,000, PLUS EX-IM'S \$84,000)?

SO AS NOT TO MAKE BUSTANI EXPORT-IMPORT CASE LOOM AS TOTAL

BLOCK, SECRETARY SHOULD ALSO ENCOURAGE SYRIANS TO APPROACH EX-IM VIA SUPPLIERS WITH RIGHT SORTS OF PROJECTS IN AMOUNTS AND IN SECTORS ATTRACTIVE TO EX-IM FOR FINANCING. WHILE SETTLEMENT OF CLAIM WOULD FACILITATE DEALINGS WITH EX-IM, WE HAVE INDICATIONS THAT EX-IM STILL WOULD CONSIDER FINANCING ATTRACTIVE PROJECTS PRIOR TO SETTLEMENT OF CLAIM NOW THAT LEGAL PROCEDURE HAS ALREADY BEGUN FOR SETTLEMENT VIA SYRIAN COURTS.

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INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 TRSE-00 SS-15 SP-02 NSC-05 AID-05 IGA-02

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P 131335Z FEB 76

FM AMEMBASSY DAMASCUS

TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 6270

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 2 OF 2 DAMASCUS 0822

WHILE WE HAVE OFFICIALLY NOTIFIED SARG ON SEVERAL OCCASIONS TO EXPECT PRIVATE CLAIMS AND USG PROPERTY CLAIMS FROM 1967 DAMAGE, WE HAVE NOT YET MADE REPRESENTATIONS ON ACTUAL CLAIMS OR THEIR AMOUNTS, AS DOCUMENTATION IS STILL BEING PREPARED IN WASHINGTON. THEREFORE, WE DO NOT RECOMMEND SECRETARY RAISE

THESE TWO CLAIM AREAS.

D. NEED FOR OVERALL AID BILATERAL AGREEMENT TO BE CONCLUDED QUICKLY:

SARG POSITION: WE DOUBT SARG WILL RAISE THIS SUBJECT, BUT IF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR DOES RAISE IT, HE MAY NOTE THE A.I.D. MISSION HAS A TECHNICAL, NOT DIPLOMATIC, FUNCTION AND IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES OF A.I.D. STAFF CANNOT BE THE SAME AS THOSE OF DIPLOMATIC ENVOYS. SARG HAS STATED THAT A NEW BILATERAL CAN BE AGREED TO THAT CONTAINS AS MANY IMMUNITIES AND PRIVILEGES AS ARE IN ITS OTHER BILATERAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION AGREEMENTS, NO MORE -- NO LESS. SARG HAS NOT PROPOSED ANY ALTERNATE TEXT TO ONE PRESENTED LAST APRIL BY THE US MISSION. THE RESPONSIBILITY FOR NEGOTIATING A NEW OVERALL US BILATERAL ECONOMIC COOPERATION AGREEMENT HAS BEEN GIVEN TO THE MINISTRY OF STATE FOR PLANNING AFFAIRS WHICH IS UNDER DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR'S OVERALL DIRECTION.

US POSITION: IF DEPUTY PRIME MINISTER HAYDAR RAISES THIS SUBJECT -- AND WE SUGGEST THAT IT BE DISCUSSED ONLY IF RAISED BY HAYDAR -- SECRETARY SIMON SHOULD COMMENT THAT AS OUR A.I.D. PROGRAMS MOVE INTO THE IMPLEMENTATION STAGE (AS CONFIDENTIAL

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MANY ARE NOW DOING -- DAMASCUS WATER SYSTEM, ENGLISH LANGUAGE PROGRAM, AGRICULTURE STUDIES), LACK OF AN AGREEMENT ON THE STATUS OF THE A.I.D. CORE STAFF TO ADMINISTER THE PROGRAMS AND LACK OF CLEAR INSTRUCTIONS TO CUSTOMS AND SARG REGULATORY AGENCIES DELAYS IMPLEMENTATION AND FRUSTRATES BOTH HAYDAR'S DESIRE TO SPEEC THINGS UP AND OUR DESIRE TO SHOW RESULTS IN OUR ECONOMIC ASSISTANCE PROGRAM.

E. NEED FOR OPIC AGREEMENT TO ATTRACT AMERICAN INVESTORS.

SARG POSITION: WE DOUBT SARG WILL RAISE, BUT IF SECRETARY SIMON RAISES WITH HAYDAR OR MINISTER OF ECONOMY IMADI, AS WE RECOMMEND, RESPONSE PROBABLY WOULD BE THAT SARG IS STUDYING OUR NOTE OF JANUARY 19 AND WILL LET US KNOW IF IT WISHES TO RESPOND TO OUR REQUEST FOR INITIAL DISCUSSIONS ON AN OPIC BILATERAL AGREEMENT IN ADVANCE OF SENDING AN OPIC NEGOTIATOR TO DAMASCUS. ONE SARG QUESTION COULD BE WHY HAVE AN OPIC QUARANTY PROGRAM WHEN MOST CONTRACTS IN SYRIA ARE SIGNED WITH SARG ENTITIES AND, THEREFORE, SARG ITSELF GUARANTEES REPAYMENT, ETC.

US POSITION: MANY US FIRMS VISITING DAMASCUS SINCE REOPENING OF THE EMBASSY IN JUNE 1974 HAVE COMMENTED ON THE LACK OF AN OPIC INVESTMENT QUARANTY PROGRAM, AS HAVE MEMBERS OF TRADE MISSIONS. US PRIVATE INVESTORS DEFINITELY SEE OPIC PROGRAM

AS INCENTIVE FOR THEM TO WORK ABROAD AND ARE MORE PRONE TO WORK IN THE 80 COUNTRIES WITH WHICH WE HAVE SUCH AGREEMENTS THAN THOSE WITH WHICH WE HAVE NO AGREEMENT. FOR SYRIA TO ATTRACT MORE AMERICAN FIRMS TO INVESTIGATE HOW THEY CAN ASSIST IN ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT OF SYRIA, WE STRONGLY BELIEVE SARG/USG OPIC AGREEMENT WOULD BE A DEFINITE BENEFIT. (IT MIGHT BE POSSIBLE TO ARRANGE SEPARATE MEETINGS BETWEEN MINISTER OF ECONOMY IMADI AND OPIC PRESIDENT MAYBE IF SO DESIRED -- PLEASE ADVISE.)

F. OVERALL WORLD FINANCIAL STABILITY, OUR EFFORTS AT JAMAICA IMF MEETING (IBRD/IMF SALARIES AS MINISTER IMADI IS 1976 CHAIRMAN OF IBRD GOVERNORS).

SARG POSITION: THESE TOPICS SO FAR AS WE ARE AWARE, WOULD INVOLVE SYRIANS MOSTLY LISTENING
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TO SECRETARY SIMON'S VIEWS. ON SALARIES ISSUES, TREASURY IS BETTER INFORMED ON SYRIAN POSITION THAN ARE WE.

US POSITION: RECOMMEND DEPARTMENT AND TREASURY PREPARE THIS PORTION GIVEN FORESEEN ONE-WAY DIALOGUE.

G. US ASSISTANCE TO ISRAEL:

SARG POSITION: SYRIANS BELIEVE IN COMPARATIVE SENSE THAT OUR AID TO ISRAEL IS HARDLY EVIDENCE OF EVEN-HANDED APPROACH. OUR MILITARY AID IS SEEN AS A DIRECT THREAT TO SYRIA, FORCING INCREASES IN SYRIAN DEFENSE BUDGET (AT EXPENSE OF ECONOMIC DEVELOPMENT BUDGET) AND ALSO FORCING SARG TO RELY HEAVILY ON USSR FOR ARMS. SYRIANS HAVE ALREADY READ OF VARIOUS CONGRESSIONAL COMMITTEE ACTIONS OR PROPOSALS POINTING TOWARD A REDUCTION IN FY 76 US AID TO SYRIA FROM THE FY 75 LEVEL OF \$83 MILLION TO \$50 MILLION OR PERHAPS \$35 MILLION OR EVEN LESS, AND SYRIANS WOULD BE INTERESTED IN DETAILS OF SYRIAN AID PROPOSALS WITHIN CONTEXT OF US-ISRAELI ASSISTANCE AND POSSIBLE CUTBACKS AND OUTLOOK FOR ENTIRE MIDDLE EAST AID PACKAGE. THRUST OF SYRIAN COMMENTS PROBABLY WILL BE MORE ALONG POLITICAL LINES REGARDING MIDDLE EAST PEACE EFFORTS, AND OUR PRO-ISRAELI STANCE AS PERCEIVED BY SYRIANS. LEVEL OF OUR ECONOMIC AID TO SYRIA WILL BE A SUBTOPIC OF THIS THEME.

US POSITION: WE HAVE WORKED TIRELESSLY SINCE THE OCTOBER 1973 WAR AND BEFORE TOWARD A JUST AND LASTING PEACE IN THE MIDDLE EAST. WE ARE DETERMINED TO CONTINUE THESE EFFORTS. (DEPT TO INSERT ADDITIONAL TALKING POINTS BASED ON MORE RECENT DEVELOPMENTS.)

H. GENERALIZED SYSTEM OF PREFERENCES (GSP):

SARG POSITION: WE STRONGLY DOUBT SYRIANS WILL RAISE. THEY WILL LISTEN ATTENTIVELY TO ANY EXPLANATION OF POTENTIAL BENEFITS TO SYRIA IN THIS AND OTHER TRADE AREAS. SYRIANS, AT LOWER BUREAUCRATIC LEVELS, ARE SOMEWHAT DISSATISFIED WITH THE LEVEL OF US IMPORTS OF SYRIAN GOODS AND MATERIALS, BUT THEY ALSO REALIZE THERE IS LITTLE SYRIA HAS TO OFFER THAT THE US NEEDS OR WOULD BE WILLING TO BUY.
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US POSITION: ACCORDING TO USG DATA, SYRIAN EXPORTS TO THE US THAT WOULD FALL UNDER NEW GSP LIBERALIZATION PROCEDURES AMOUNT TO LESS THAN \$100,000 OUT OF SYRIA'S TOTAL EXPORTS TO THE US AVERAGING \$2 TO 3 MILLION PER YEAR (US EXPORTS TO SYRIA HAVE AVERAGED \$25 MILLION PER YEAR, BUT IN 1975 JUMPED TO CLOSE TO \$100 MILLION AND 1976 SHOULD BE OVER \$200 MILLION GIVEN EXPORT OF \$105 MILLION WORTH OF LOCOMOTIVES.) RECOMMEND SECRETARY TOUCH ON GSP ONLY IN CONTEXT OF OUR OTHER INTERNATIONAL TRADE LIBERALIZATION EFFORTS IF SYRIAN REMARKS PROVIDE OPENING FOR SUCH COMMENTS FROM SECRETARY.
MURPHY

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